

DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY, GUJARAT STATE

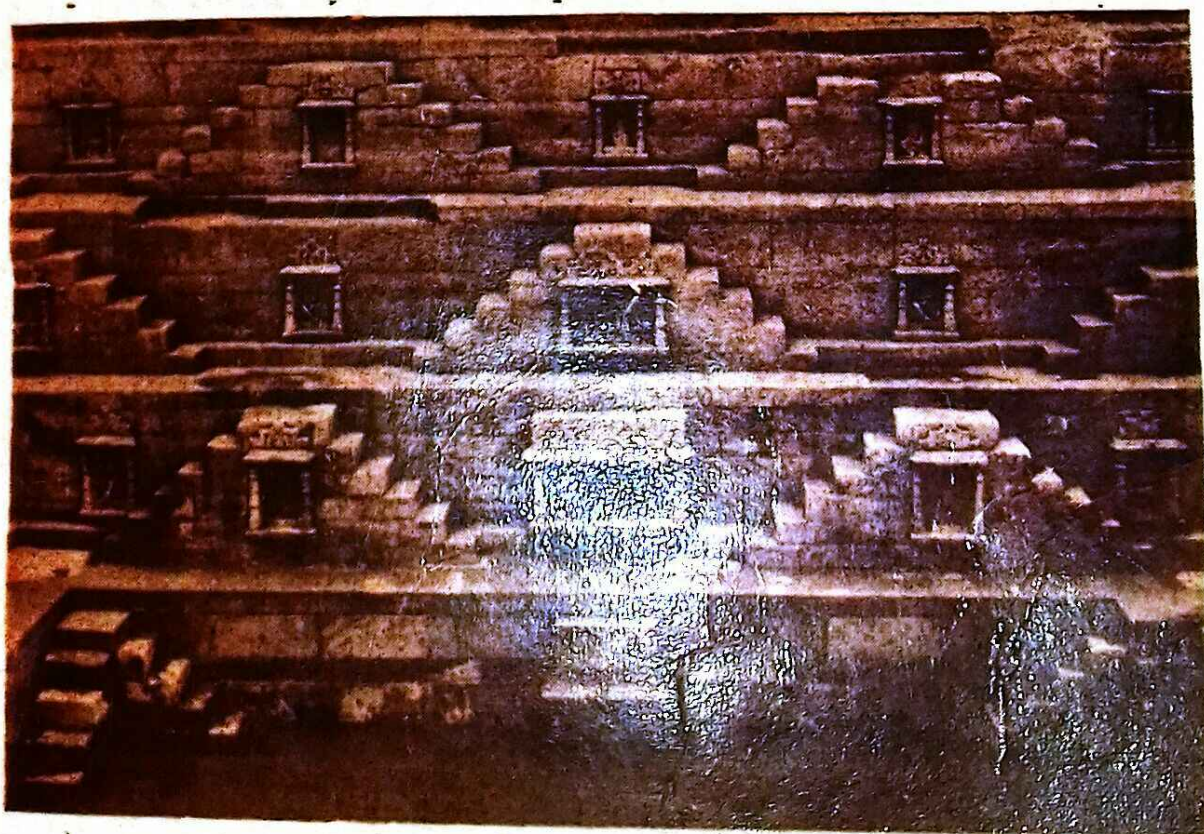


Silver Jubilee Year Publication
1988-89

THE ŚAKTI KUNDA AT ĀKHAJ

BY

Dr. P. C. PARIKH



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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The Government of Gujarat has decided to celebrate this year as the 'Silver Jubilee Year of The Department of Archaeology, Gujarat State'. The Department has worked out the various programmes for this celebration. To prepare and publish a series of Monographs is one of them.

In this 'Silver Jubilee Publication Series', I am glad to publish the monograph "The Sakti Kuṇḍa At Ākhaj". This Kuṇḍa is declared as protected monument on 14-12-1970. The conservation of the Kuṇḍa has been done by the Department thrice in the years 1969-70, 1971-72 and 1973-74.

This Monograph has been prepared in an archaeological method. It contains the architectural and the iconographic descriptions in detail. I congratulate Dr. P. C. Parikh (Director, B. J. Institute of Learning & Research, Ahmedabad) for this task and I also thank him to give permission to publish this monograph on this Silver Jubilee occasion.

31-3-1989
Ahmedabad

M. H. Rawal
Director,
Department of Archaeology,
Gujarat State

PREFACE

The Śakti Kuṇḍa at Ākhaj is one of the distinguished religious monuments of North-Gujarat. Dr. Harilal Gaudani of Ahmedabad, has thrown light for the first time in 1979 on this monument in his famous book : 'Mahā Gujaratnu Shilpa ane Sthāpatya' (in Gujarati). According to him the site was cleared by the people of Akhaj in 1967 & 1969.

The Department of Archaeology (Gujarat State) has declared this monument protected in 1970. Its conservation took place in the years 1969-70, 1971-72 and 1973-74.

I am glad to publish my study about the architecture and iconography of this Kuṇḍa. To expound the description, twenty illustrations have been incorporated in this monograph.

I am thankful to Mr. M. H. Rawal, Director of Archaeology, Gujarat State, for accepting this monograph for publication in this Silver Jubilee Year (1988-89) of the Department of Archaeology, Gujarat State.

I express my indebtedness to the Department of Archaeology in accepting the photographs for fig. nos. 7, 9, 11, 12, 14 & 16. I am indebted to Dr. Harilal Gaudani for supplying a photograph of Gaja-Lakṣmī.

I am also thankful to Prof. R. T. Savalia and Dr. Balaji Ganorkar of my Institute for their sincere cooperation.

March, 21st, 1989

P. C. PARIKH

Director,

B. J. Institute, Ahmedabad

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INTRODUCTORY

Water is one of the essential elements associated with human life. From the time immemorial man needs water not only for drinking but for the purpose of cultivating food-grains also.

In ancient times for the fulfilment of his above needs man was entirely dependent on rains fall which was either irregular or caused complete drought. Man was, therefore, compelled to invent the system of irrigation and he dug out the canals to divert some of the water of rivers and natural lakes; but when we come to know about the subterranean storage of water, he dug up deep wells.

In the region of Gujarat in medieval period the problem of water supply was acute, as it is today too. This deficiency has been recouped to some extent, by the construction of various types of artificial reservoirs like lake (sara), pond (taḍāga), well (kūpa) and step-well (vāpī and kuṇḍa).

A kuṇḍa, as a reservoir, is an unique construction of a well with flight of steps on all the four directions. Such stepped construction of the well is wellknown in Gujarat as 'Kuṇḍa'.

In the Chaulukyan period (A.D. 942-1304) of Gujarat chronicles and inscriptions mention the construction of aforementioned several types of artificial reservoirs by the royal personages as well as the citizens. This

tradition seems to have been maintained during the Muslim rule (A.D. 1304–1757) too. And hence several beautifully carved important reservoirs built during both the periods, some of which still persist either in Sanskrit or Persian or in both the languages. Those which do not contain inscriptions are also noteworthy due to either their architectural form or sculptural decor.

One such beautifully decked kuṇḍa, of the third quarter of 10th century A. D.¹ is explored few years back by the Villagers of Akhaja (Dist. Mehsana). This is known as the 'śakti Kuṇḍa'. It was subsequently conserved by the Archaeological Department of Gujarat State. The site also revealed abundant fragments of extinct temple and 'kīrtitorāṇa' (gateway), probably once rested on the principal platform (paṭṭaśālā) of the Kuṇḍa, in which are found highly ornate niched figures of divine and semi-divine beings, pillars and capitals, beams and arches and pieces of a spire (śikhara), a cogged-wheel (āmalaka) and a cupola (kalaśa) etc.

Village Akhaj is 15 k. m. South-East to Mehsana, the district head quarter; and 4 k. m. North-East to Ambaliasan, a railway station on meter guage line of Western Railway running Ahmedabad to Delhi. In ancient times this village was situated on the way of Anahil-Pattan to Āśāpalli (i. e. Asāval, an ancient site located in the South-East area in Ahmedabad City).

1. Figs : 1, 2, 3 & 4a-b

THE ARCHITECTURAL TREATMENT OF THE KUṆḌA

Horizontally, i. e. from the view point of ground-plan, the square Kuṇḍa consists of a circular well (kūpa) in the centre now immersed under the water, surrounded by a square landing (śālā) with a right-angular stair or flight of steps (koṇa-sopāna-śreṇī) on each of its corner leading to the surface of the second landing. This landing has two side-descents (savyā-savya-sopāna-śreṇīs) on each of its sides, leading to the upper course of the third landing, the facades of the side-stairs being open to penalled-niches. The third landing too, has similar two descents plus corner right-angular descent on each of its sides leading to the uppermost course, the principal paved platform (paṭṭas'ālā) of the Kuṇḍa, on which once, probably stood the highly ornate temple and 'kīrtitorāṇa' now both being extinct.

Thus horizontally the Kuṇḍa is divided into five sections, well in the centre, surrounded by three successive intermediate sections of landings and a principal platform at the end.²

Vertically, all the sections on four sides, except one of the platforms, contain dwarf walls (bhittiṣas) constituting the storey (māḍha) of the Kuṇḍa. Except the plain wall (koṣṭha) of the central well, they are

2. See fig. 2.

decked with ringed-pillared niches containing the figures of the divine beings. The niches in the centre are rectangular, the rest are nearly square in shape.

The vertical section of the dwarf-wall, attached to the lower most course, has a niched-pave in the centre and a right-angular corner stair on each of its sides. Thus this wall contains four panelled-niches (khattakas) and four right-angular stairs (koṇa-sopāna-s'reṇis) in all.

The vertical section of the dwarf-wall attached to first intermediate landing has five niches, the central rectangular one flanked by two nearly square niches and two side descents (savyāsavya - sopāna - śreṇis) on each of its sides i. e. this landing contains twenty niches and eight stairs in all. In arrangement, the central rectangular niche is on the wall-surface and the four square niches are on its both sides, two being on the facade of the stairs and the other two on the surface of the wall similar in position to that of the central niche.

The vertical section of the wall attached to second intermediate landing has five niches and one descent in the centre of each of its sides. It has on each of its corner the right-angular descent too. Thus this landing contains twenty niches, four side stairs in the centre and four corner right-angular descents in all. Here, the arrangement of niches is slightly different one. The central rectangular niche, on each side of the landing, is on the facade of the central descent flanked by four square niches on both of its sides,

two being on the surface of the wall and two other on the faced of the conner descent, similar in position to that the central one.

The wall attached to the third intermidiate landing has seven niches, two descents and a corner right-angular descent on each of its sides, thus constituting twenty-eight niches, eieht side-descents and four right-angular corner-descents in all. Here all the niches are nearly square in shape, the central one on each side of the landing being placed on the wall-surface and is flanked by two niches placed on the facades of the descents on both sides, one on each and two other niches again on the wall-surface just between the side descent and the corner descent on each side.

Thus in vertical treatment, the Kuṇḍa is a five storied (Pañca-bhūmika) structure³ which contains in all 72 pillared niches, 12 being rectangular and the rest nearly square in shape; 20 side-stairs and 12 right-angular stairs. The rectangular niches in the centre of the wall of each intermidiate landing are composed of dentiled 'āsanapaṭṭa' (locally called ḍāso) on which rest two ringed pillars (stambhikās), one on each of its side, super-imposed with a horizontal beam (samatalapāṭa) and each cave (chhādyā) adorned with a beautifully carved pediment in the centre. Above this rests the ornate panalled-pediment, known as 'udgama', carved in sectional stepped-out arrangement with intigrated curves within curves (Jātaka). Similar treatment is seen in all other niches too.

3. Figs. 2 & 4a-b.

In the Canonical Works a kuṇḍa, square in shape is called 'bhadra-ka.'⁴ The Kuṇḍa at Akhaj is of this type. It is further stated that the 'bhiṭtas' (walls) of the kuṇḍa may be adorned with niched-figures and that the landings and principal platform with porches (s'ringāra-cokis), temples (Devālayas) and arched-gates (toranas) etc.⁵ Accordingly the walls of the Akhaj Kuṇḍa are found adorned with niched-figures of divine beings and abundant loose sculptures and a heap of architectural fragments lying on its bank are indicative of the existence of a temple and a 'torana' associated with the extant Kuṇḍa.

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4. Aparājitaprcchā (G. O. S. No. CXV) LXXXIV 12-13, p. 183; 'Rājavallabha' of Maṇḍana Sūtradhāra Ed. with Gujarati translation by Narayanbharti Y. Gonsai, Ahmedabad, 1924), IV-31, pp. 78 f.

The other three varieties of a kuṇḍa are known as 'Subhadra' (with a central projection 'bhadra' in each of its sides), 'Nanda' or 'Nandākhyā' (with two projections, principal one 'bhadra' at the centre and the other 'pratibhadra', flanking on both of its sides) and 'Parigha' (probably circular in shape).

भद्रकं सुभद्रकं च नन्दाख्यं परिघं तथा ।
 कुण्डानि देवताश्रेषु कार्याणि शान्तिमिच्छता ॥१२॥
 चतुरस्रं भद्रकं स्यात् सुभद्रं भद्रसंयुतम् ।
 नन्दाख्यं प्रतिभद्रेषु परिघं मध्यभिद्वकम् ॥१३॥

5. Aparājitaprcchā pp. 14 f; Rājavallabha, 32-79

THE SCHEME OF ARRANGEMENT OF SCULPTURES IN THE KUNDA AND THE IDENTIFICATION THEREOF

As narrated above the walls (bhittas) of the Kunda and that of the three intermediate landings contain several sculptures, either in a panel or singular in the disposition.

The wall of the lowermost section on each side has a niched-panel of divine beings, the identification thereof could not be assessed due to their immersion under the water.

Of the five niches on the East of the first intermediate landing, the central rectangular one and a square niche on one of its sides, being restored later on, are vacant. Out of the three others, two, one on each extreme end, contain figures of Gaṇeśa standing in 'dwibhaṅga' posture; one of which holds a serpent (sarpa) and a 'damaru' in his respective right and left upper hands and a trident (triśūla) in the lower right hand, the corresponding left one being damaged.

The second figure of Gaṇeśa, at the extreme, carries a serpent and a trident respectively in his right and left upper hands, there the lower two hands are damaged.

The remaining third niche, on one of the sides of the central niche, contains a damaged image of a

seated god, who holds a lotus (padma) in his upper right hand and the lower left hand being in a fear-not (abhaya) posture. This is probably an image of Viṣṇu.

The figures in the niches of the walls of the second and third landings on this direction are missing, except the one in the niche on one of the extreme of the third landing. In this niche there is a seated god who holds a spear (śakti) and an elephant-goad (aṅkūśa) respectively in his right and left upper two hands, the lower corresponding two hands are adorned with a boon-giving posture marked with a rosary (varadā-kṣamālā posture) and a pitcher (kalaśa) respectively. This figure seems to be representing Indra, the regent deity of the Eastern direction.

Among the five niches on the **Southern** direction of the first landing, the central, restored one, does not contain any figure. Out of the two niches on its right, the niche on the extreme right-end contains a figure of standing Gaṇeśa with uplifted face (in the manner that of Varāha, the incarnation of Viṣṇu). He is canopied by a five-hooded cobra. He holds a snake (sarpa) in the right upper hand. The rest all hands are damaged. There is a snake with uplifted hood on his left.

The niche between this and the central one contains a naked figure of a goddess of small-pox (Śitalā)⁶, mounted on her vehicle donkey. With her upper two hands she holds the winnswing-basket and her lower right one holds a small sword (chhūrikā) the corresponding left hand is adorned with a skull-bowl.

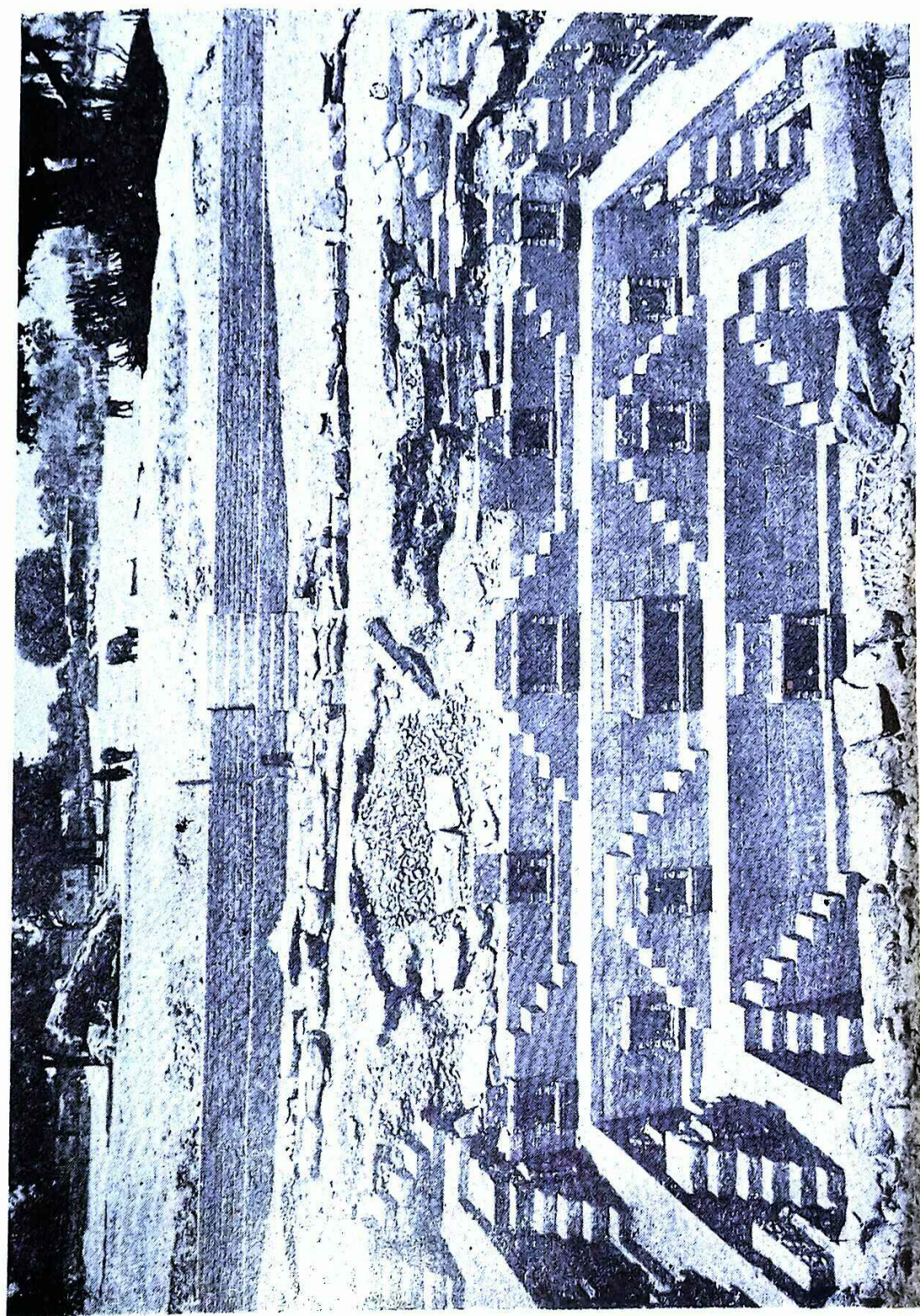


PLATE I

Fig. 1
The Kuṇḍa
Before
Conservation

PLATE II

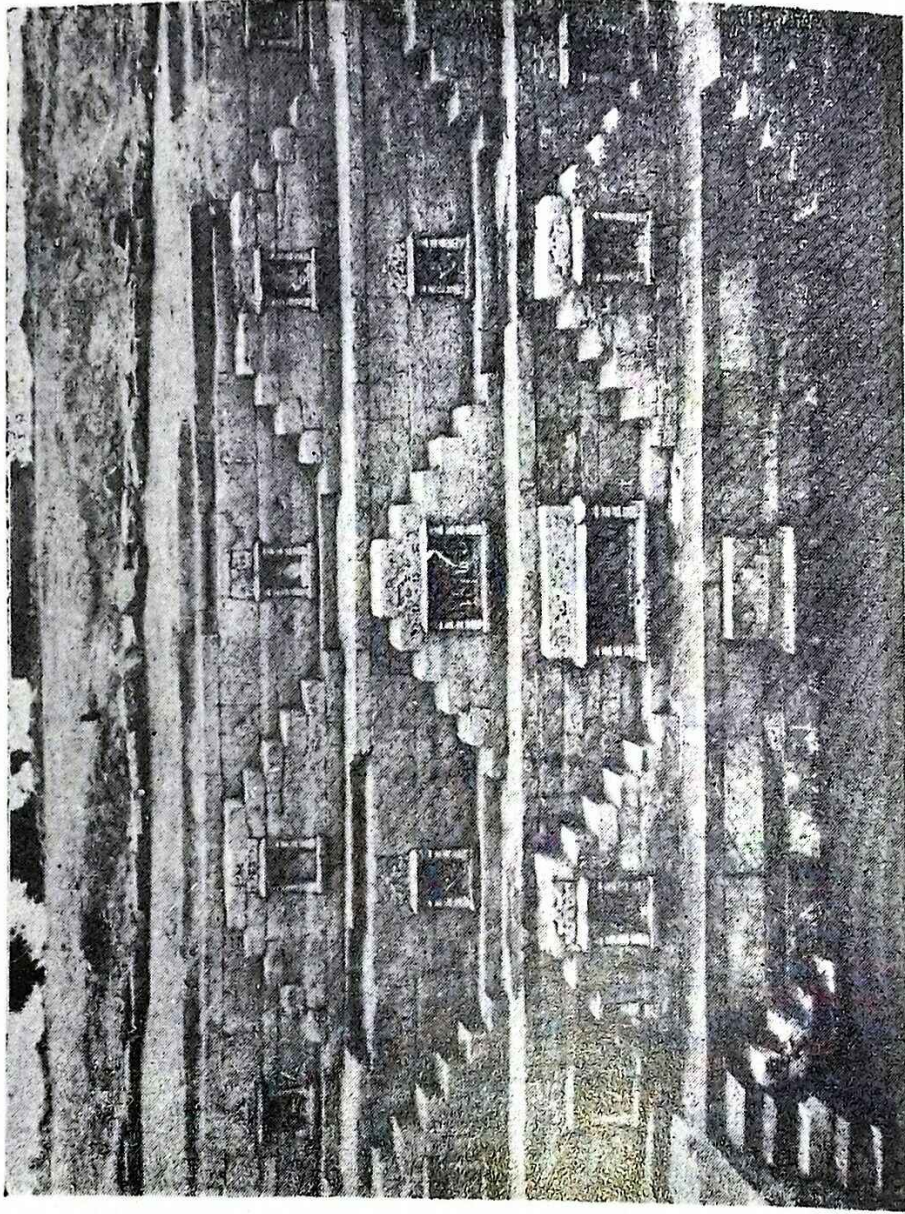
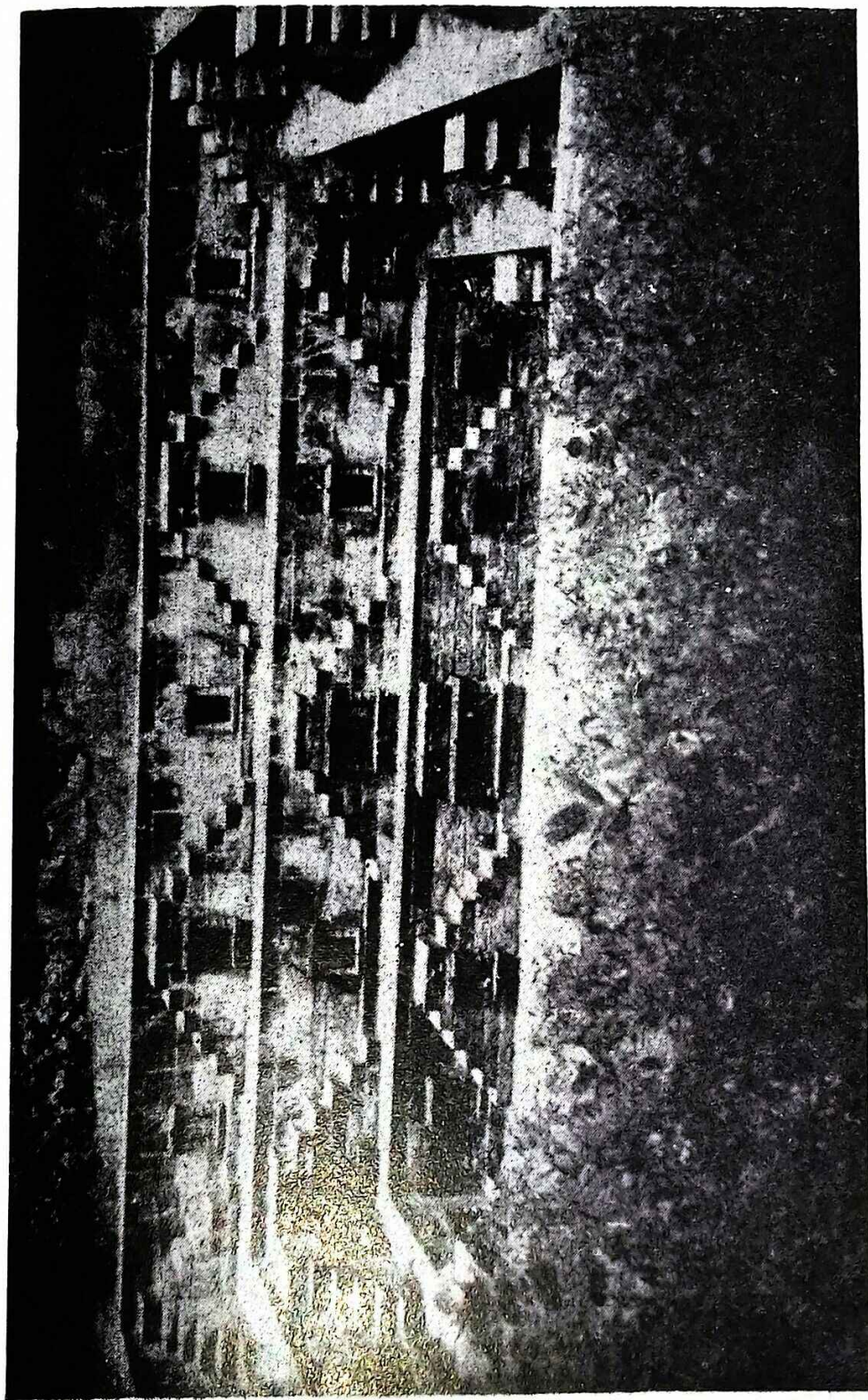


Fig. 2

After Conservation

PLATE III



General View

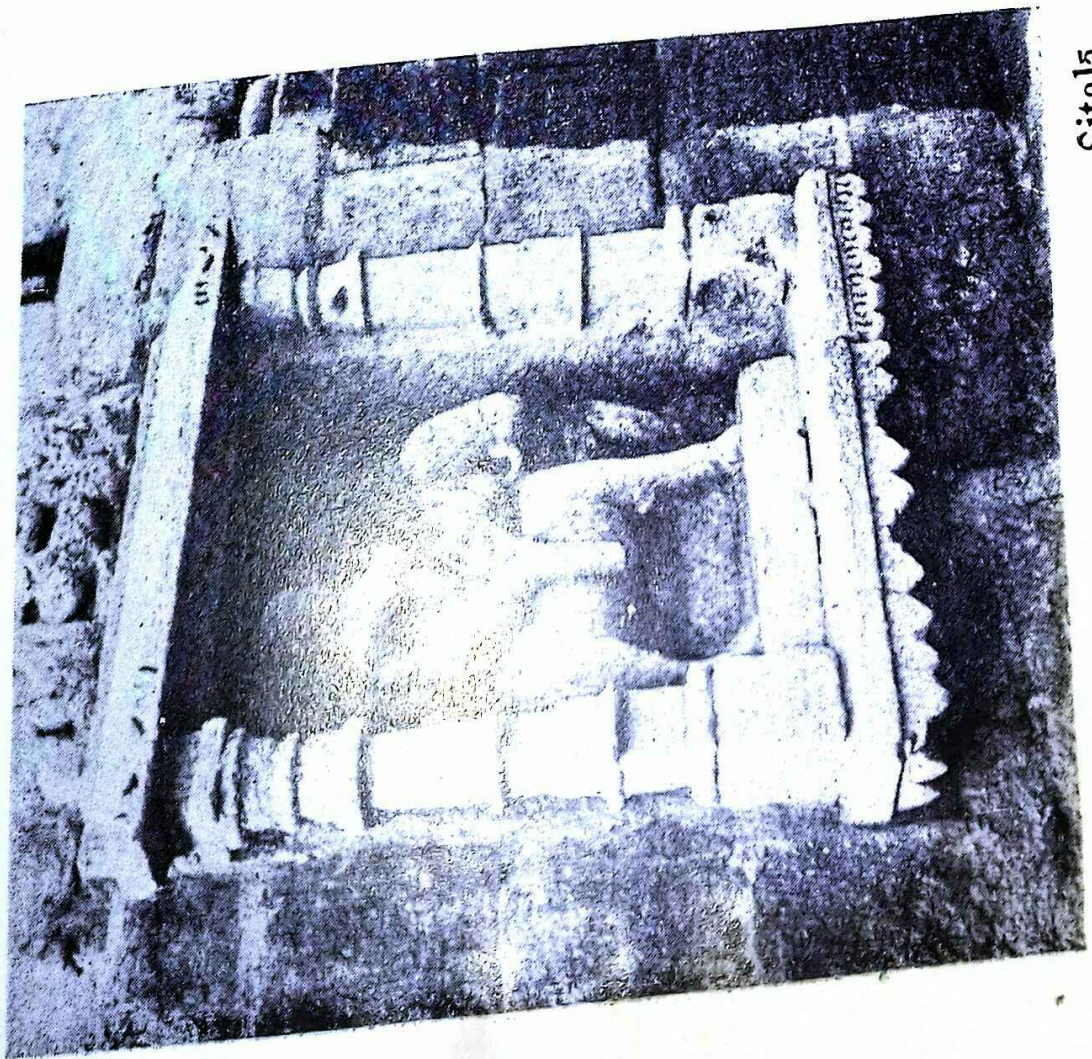
Fig. 3



Fig. 4 b

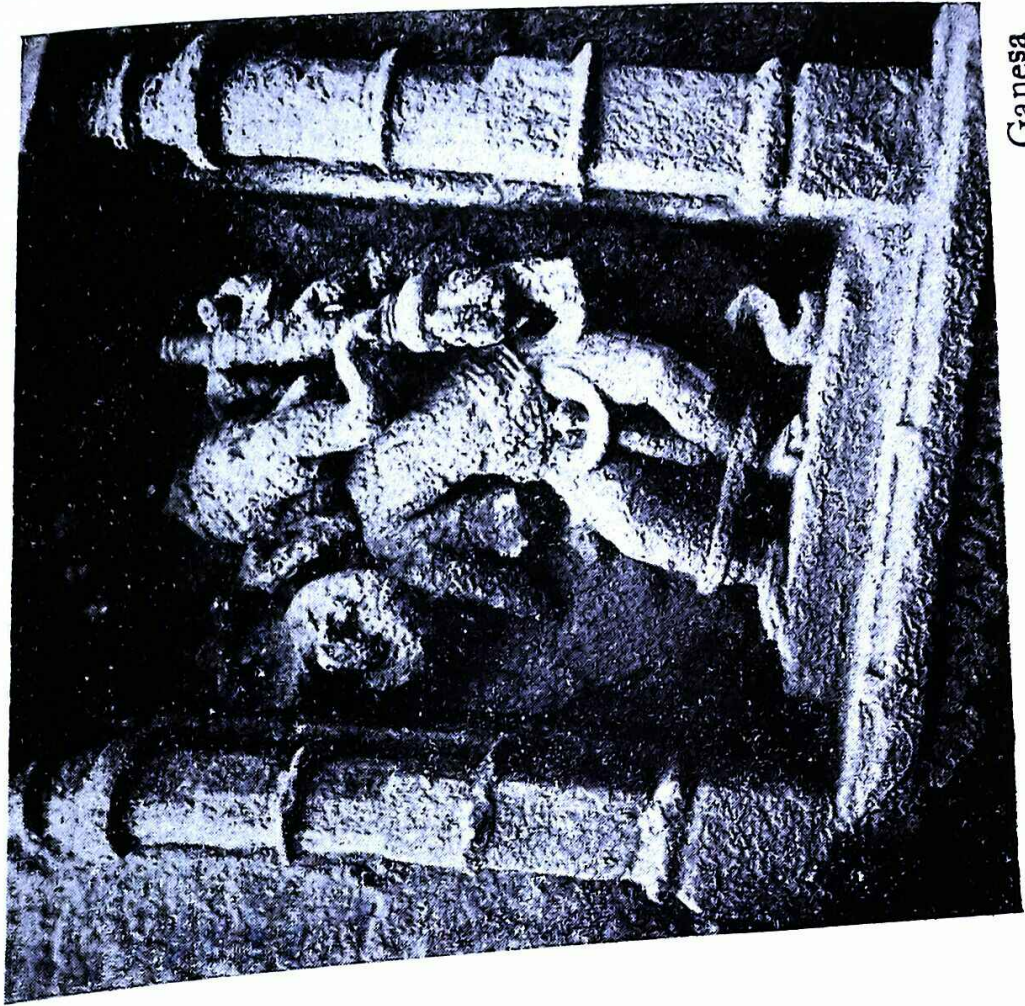
N. W. View

PLATE V



Sitala

Fig. 5



Ganesa

Fig. 6

PLATE VI



Fig. 7

Agni

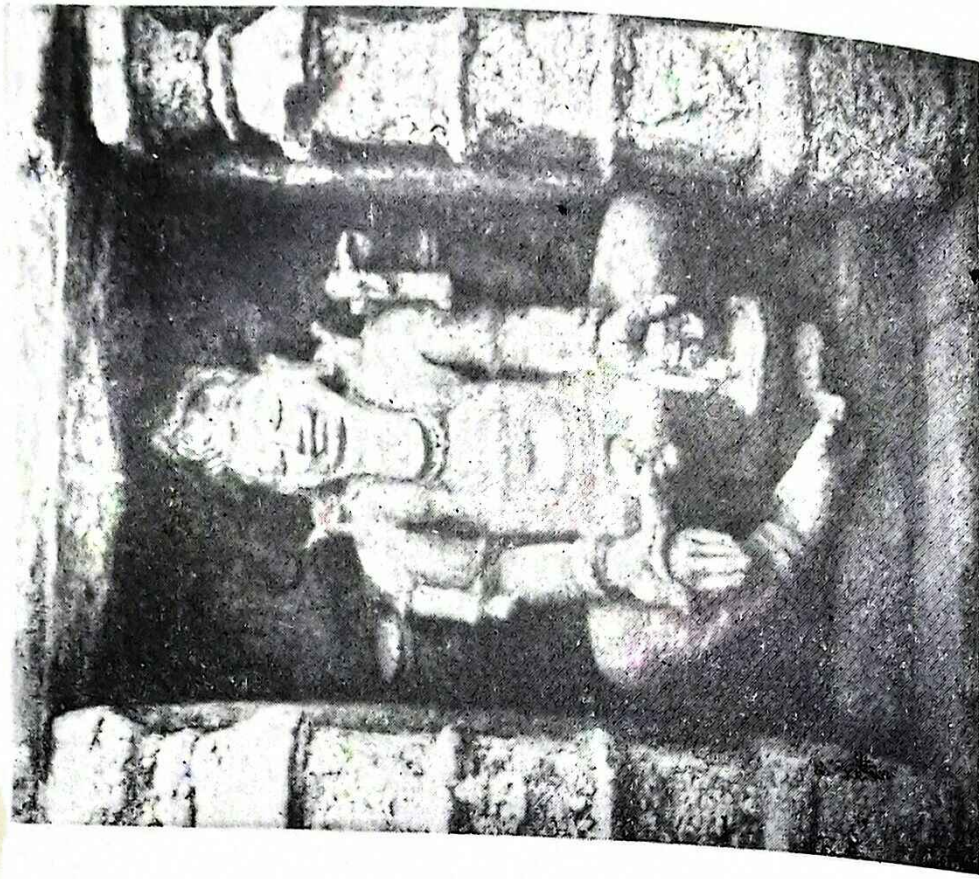


Fig. 8

Brahmā

PLATE VII

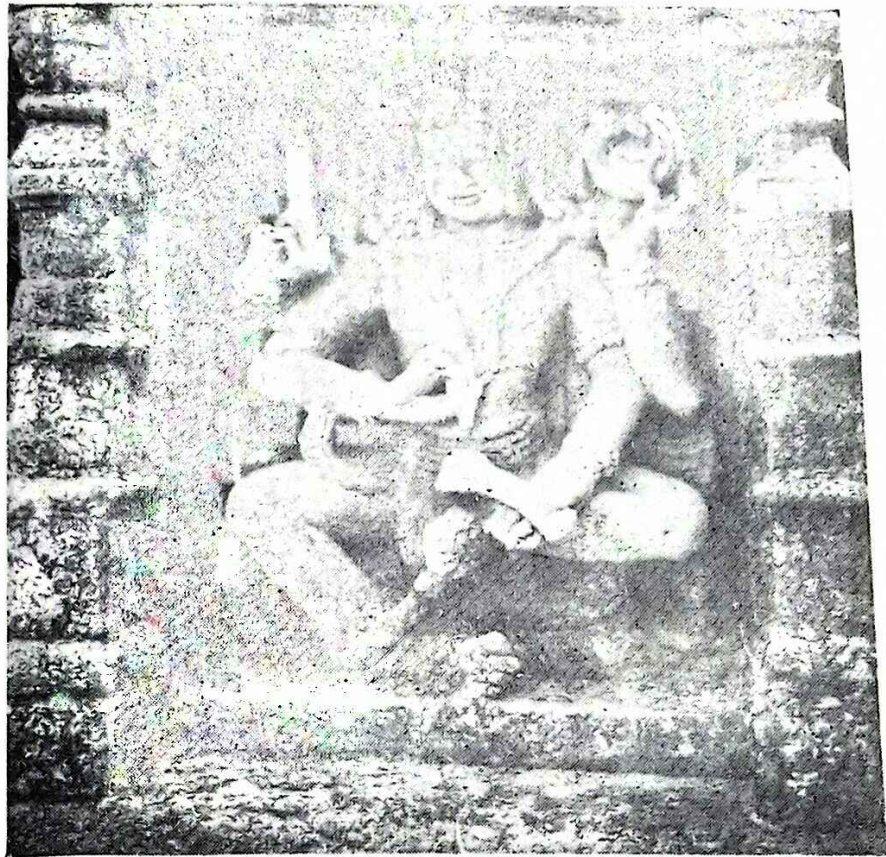


Fig. 9

Yama

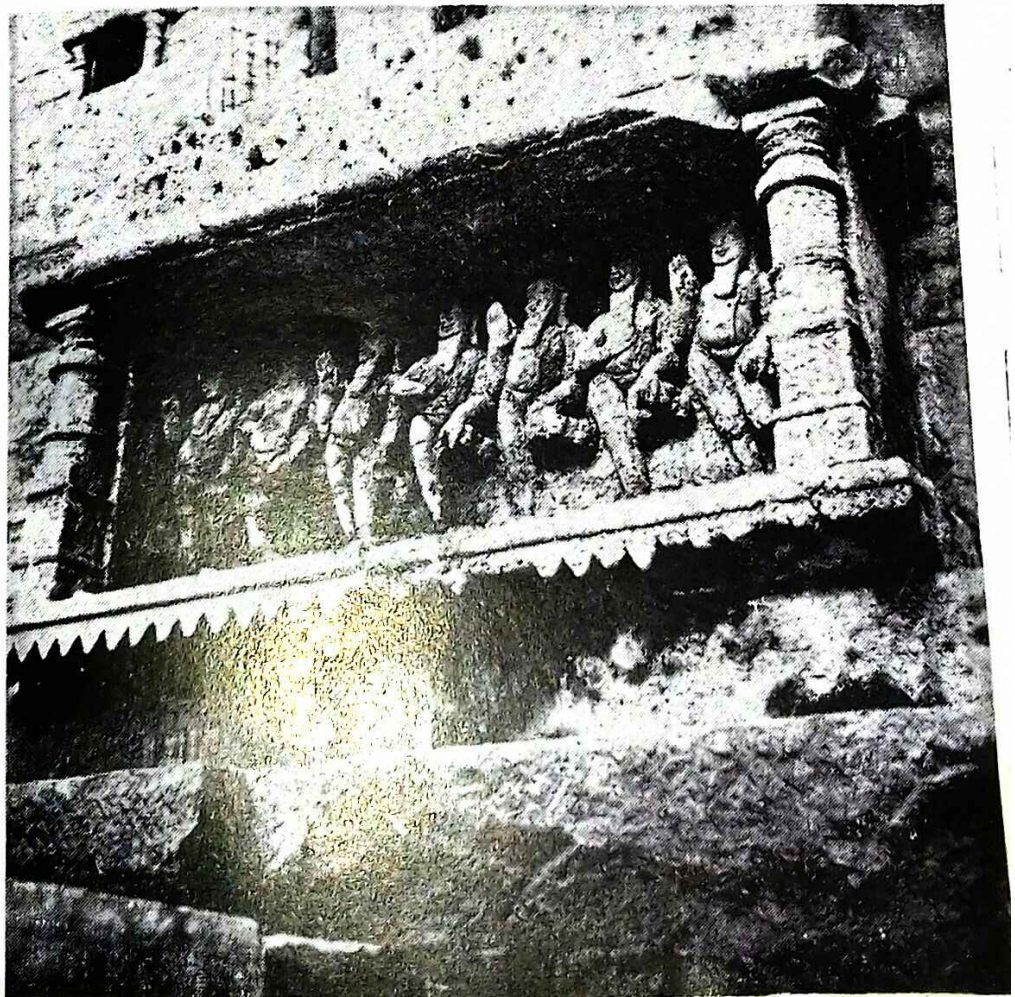
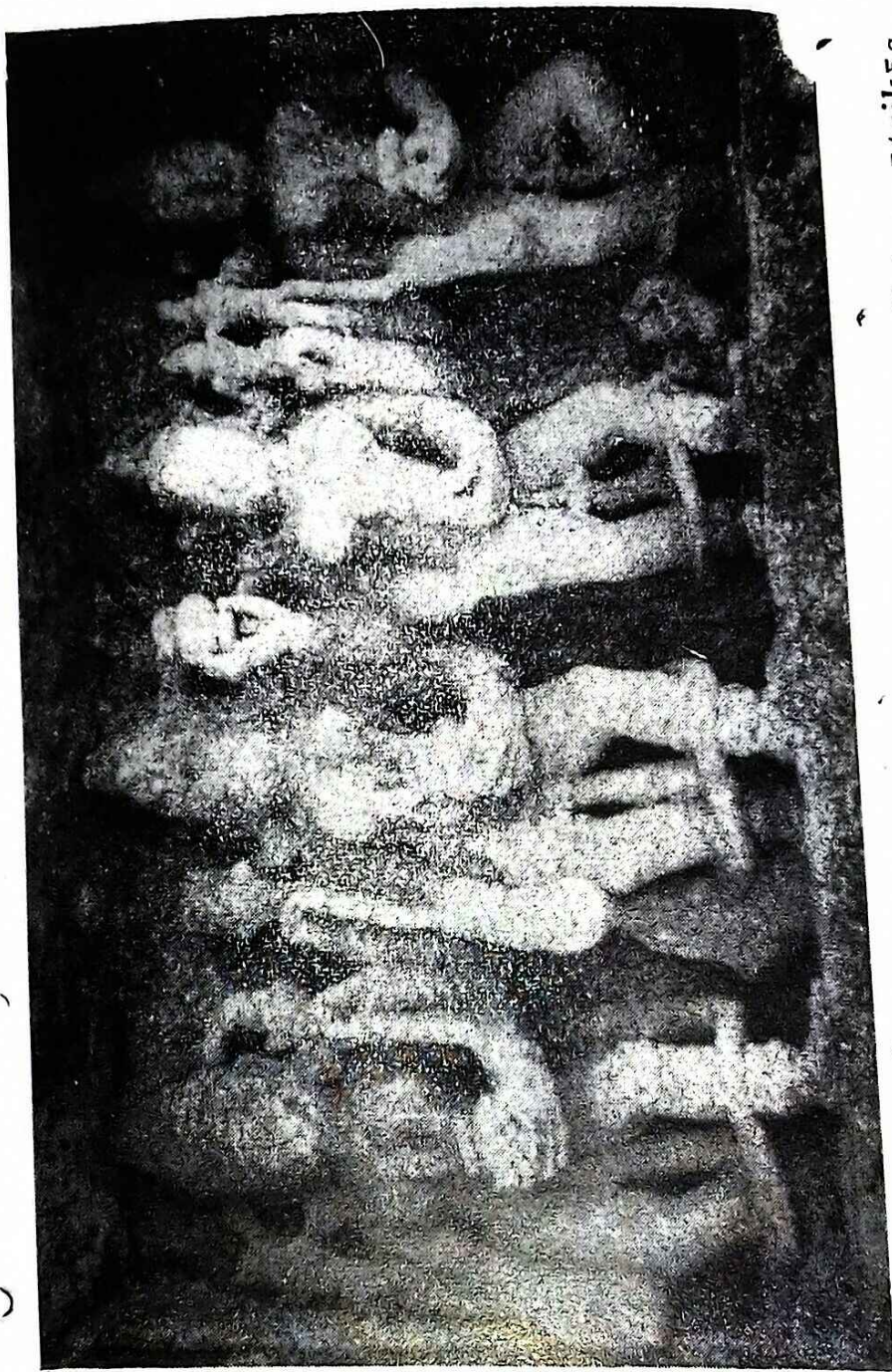


Fig. 10

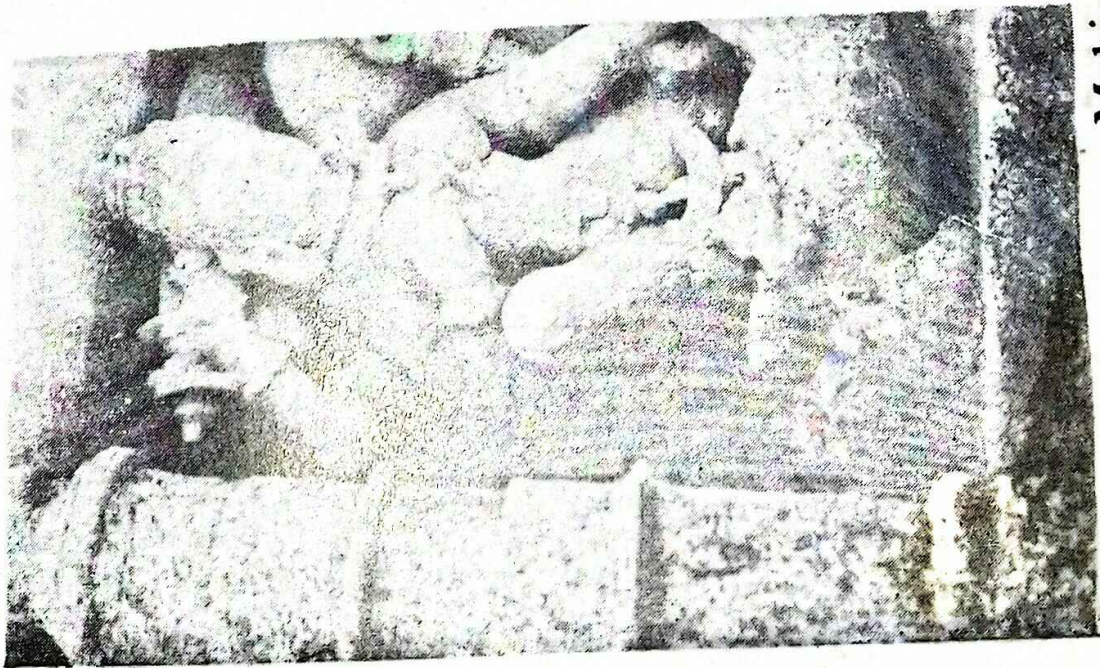
Saptarṣis

PLATE VIII



Caturmātrikās

Fig. 12



Mahiṣ

Fig. 11

PLATE X



Fig. 14

Goddess

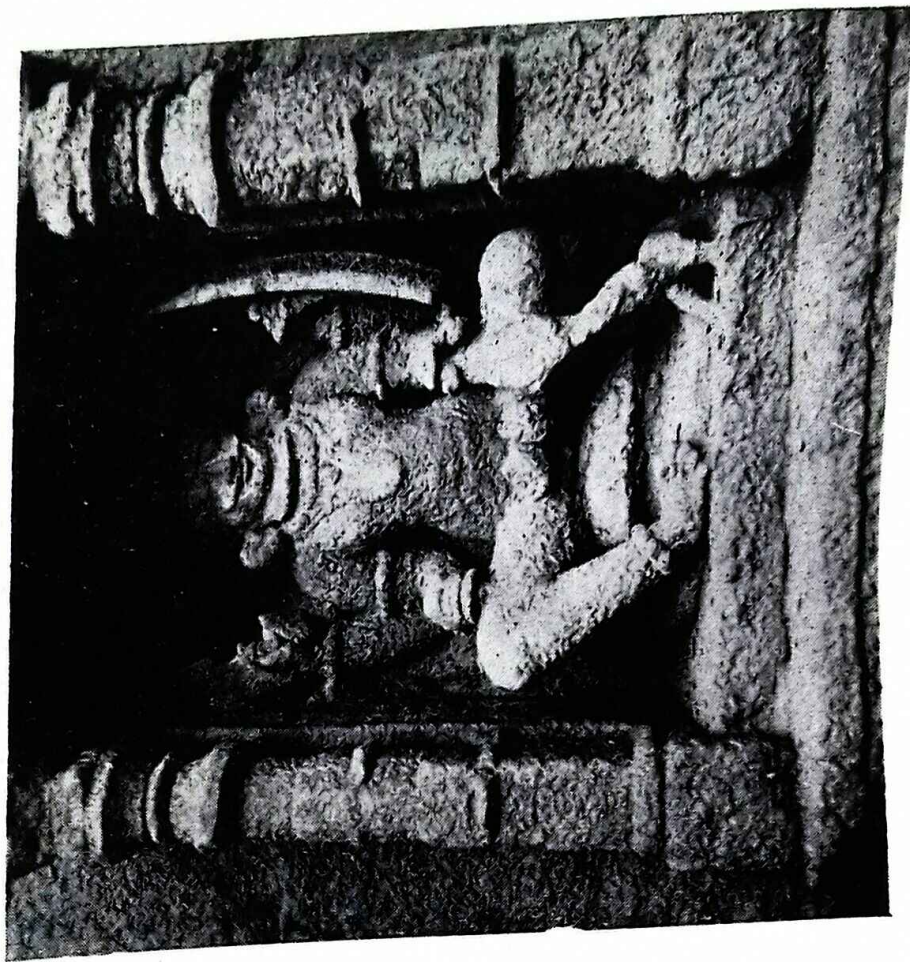
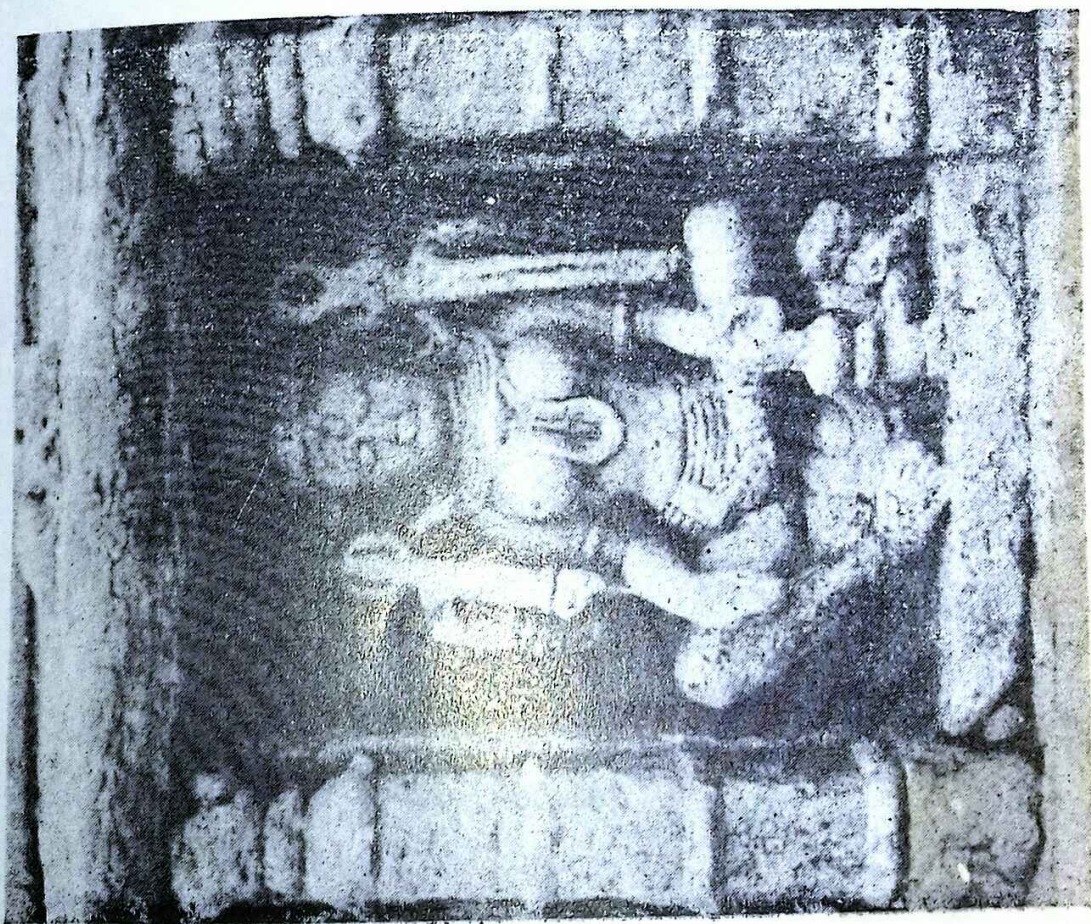


Fig. 15

Bhairava

PLATE XI



Indrāṇī

Fig. 16

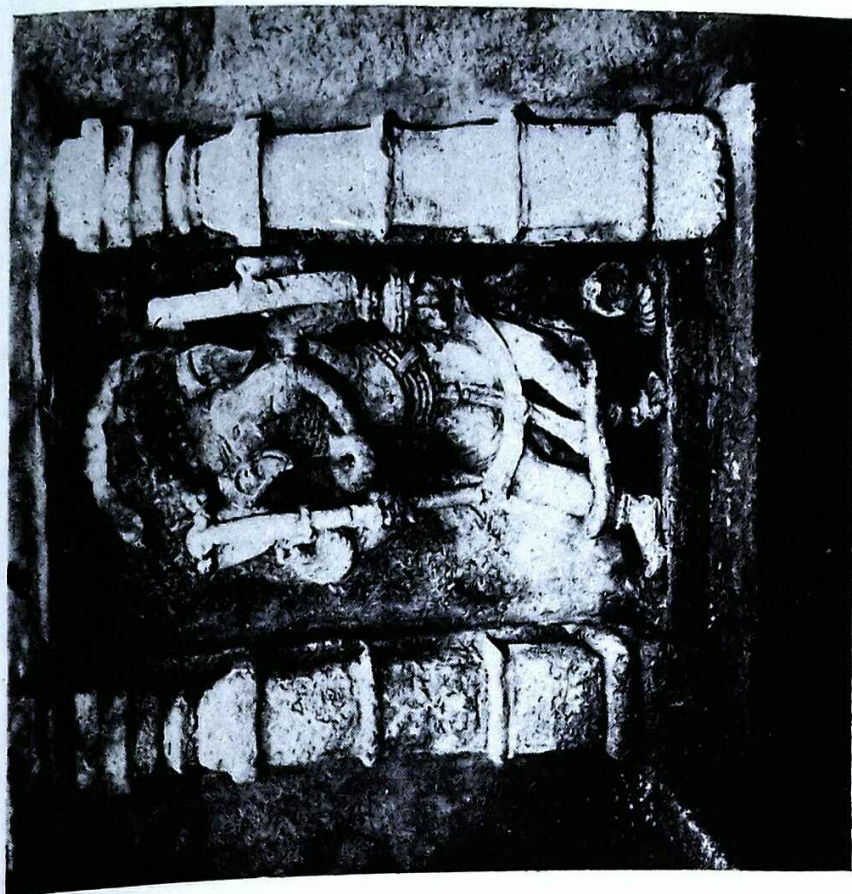


Fig. 17

Gaṇeśa

PLATE XII

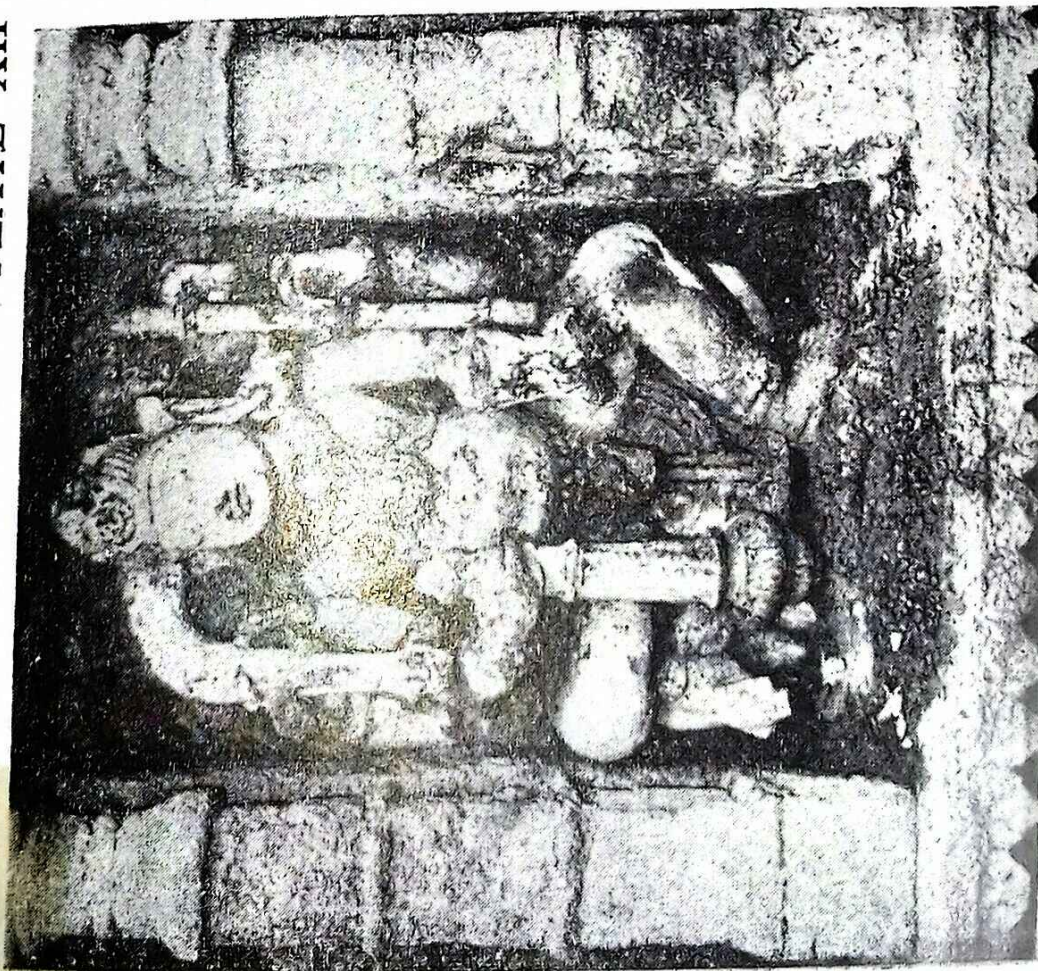


Fig. 18

Kubera

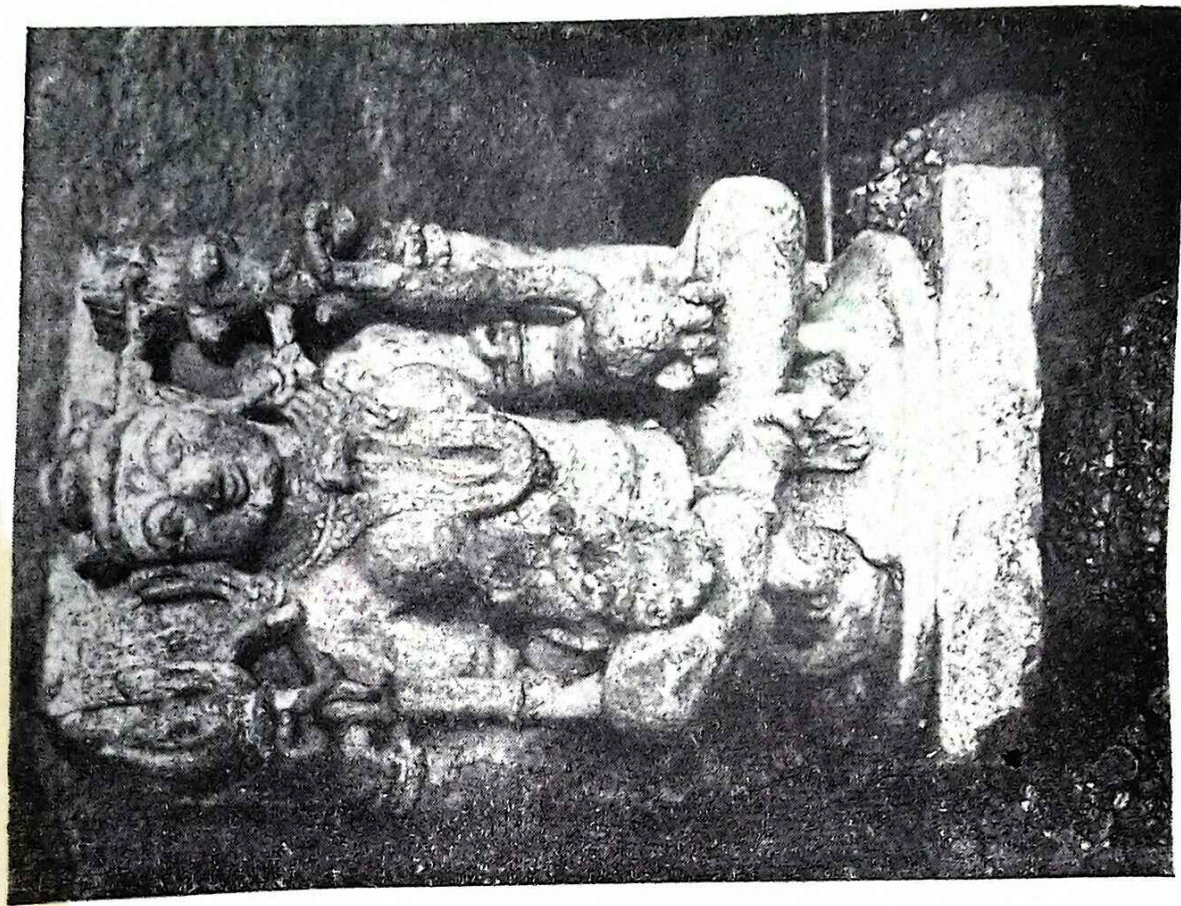


Fig. 19

Goddess

The niche on the left extreme of this landing has a figure of standing Gaṇeśa⁷, canopied by a five-hooded cobra. In his upper two hands he holds a three-hooded cobra and an elephant-goad (aṅkūśa) respectively. The right lower hand is completely damaged, the corresponding left one contains a pitcher (kalaśa or kumbha). On his left the snake is represented in a sitting posture upholding its hood.

The niche between the above and the central one contains a male figure rasing from a pot. There are matted and twisted hair on his head and a beard on the face. His two hands are mutilated. This figure seems to be representing Agni,⁸ the regent deity of the South-East direction.

The figures in the niches on the second landing, except the two in the niches on the two extremes of this direction, are missing. The niche on the right extreme contains the figure of Brahmā, seated in a 'lalitāsana' posture. The upper two right hands are damaged. The lower right hand is in 'varadākṣamālā' posture and the lower left hand holds a pitcher.⁹

The niche on the left extreme of the landing contains a seated figure of Yama,¹⁰ the regent-deity of

7. Fig. 6

8. Fig. 7

A similar image of Agni is found from the Rani-vav, at Patan (N.G.).

9. Fig. 8

10. Fig. 9

the Southern direction. With his upper two hands he holds a flag-staff (dhvaja-daṇḍa) and a cock (kukkuṭa) respectively. The lower two hands are adorned with a pen (Lekhinī) and a scripture (pustaka). His vehicle buffalo (Mahisa) is seated on his right.

The central niche of the third landing on this direction contains a figure of a god seated in a 'lali-tāsana' posture. His all the four hands are completely damaged and so this difficult to identify him.

The niche on the right extreme of this landing contains probaly a figure of Kārttikeya, seated in 'lalitāsana' posture, as indicated by his vehicle pea-cook (mayūra) on his left. Out of his four arms only the lower right one, in boon-giving (varada) posture, is survive.

The niche between this and the central one has a figure of a goddess probably Lakṣmī. She is seated in a meditating posture (yogāsana). Her upper two arms hold a lotus. The lower right hand is in abhaya posture, while the corresponding left one holds a citron fruit (Bijapūraka or Santāna-mañjarī).

The figure in the niche on the left one of this landing is seated in a 'lalitāsana' posture, but it is completely mutilated, hence difficult to identify it.

Similarly the niche between the above and the central one contains a figure of a goddess which is highly damaged except her torso and the upper left hand holding a lotus.

Of the five niches on the West of the first landing the central rectangular niche contains a panel of

standing two armed figures of seven Ṛṣis (Saptarṣi-Maṇḍala). Most of them are either in a fear-not or in a meditating (cintana) posture.¹¹ Out of the two corner square niches one contains a figure of Gaṇeśa, holding with two upper right and left hands a serpent and a mace (gadā) respectively. His lower right hand is completely mutilated and with the corresponding left hand he bears a sweat-ball (modaka).

The niche between the above niche and the central one is adorned with a figure of four-armed Mahiṣāsūramardini.¹² Her upper two hands respectively holds a sword (khadga) and a heavy mace (khetaka), with the lower uplifted right hand she pierces the spear in the body of the demon Mahiṣa, with her corresponding left hand she holds the tail of the demon represented in an animal form. Out of the two niches on the left of the central one, the one on the extreme again contains a figure of standing Gaṇeśa, whose upper two hands hold respectively a mace and a lotus (padma), the two lower hands completely damaged. On the left of the figure there is a cobra with his raised hood.

The niche in the centre between the central niche and just described above has now damaged but once beautifully carved, composite six-armed figure of Hariharārka i. e. a composite figure of Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Sūrya. One of the heads of this figure is adorned with 'kiritmukuta' (meant for Viṣṇu and Sūrya). All the hands are damaged except the one which holds a lotus

11. Fig. 10

12. Fig. 11

(kamala, a sure sign of Sūrya). The vehicle of Śiva, Vṛṣabha is visible on the left of the figure.

The wall of the second landing on this direction, in its five niches, has figures of divine beings. The central niche has, here, a panel of four mother-goddesses (Caturmātrikas).¹³ The first on the right in upper two arms holds a lotus-stalk (kamala-nāla). The second one holds a lotus-stalk in upper right hand. Her left upper hand interwine the right arm of the third figure and thus both support the uplifted holy water-pot (kumbha), the left upper arm of the third holding again a lotus-stalk. The last figure on the left extreme with her upper two arms hold a lotus-stalk and a pot respectively. Out of the lower two arms of all the figures, the right one is a boon-giving attitude marked with a rosary in the open palm, while the left one holds a holy water-pot. Each figure is standing in a 'dvibhaṅga' posture. Probably these figures indicate the presence of the four major river-goddesses of India.

The niche on the extreme right of the central niche contains a figure of Varuṇa, seated in the 'lalitāsana' posture with his vehicle crocodile (makara) on his left, below his seat. Out of the two right hands, the upper one holds a noose (pāśa) and the lower one is in the 'varadākṣa mālā' posture. The upper hand of the left holds a lotus-stalk while the lower one holds a pitcher (kamaṇḍala).¹⁴

The niche between the aforementioned two niches contains a figure of a goddess seated in the 'ardhaparyāṅ-

13. Fig. 12

14. Fig. 13

kāsana' posture. She in her upper right hand holds a trident (triśūla), the corresponding left hand holds a lotus-bud. With the lower two hands she holds a pot just below her breasts.¹⁵ Here the posture of the goddess suggests that she is making the water sacred (Abhimañ-trita). She is beautifully decked with ornaments like necklace, (kañṭhahāra), earrings (kaṇṭhāfūla), armlets (bājubandha), bangales (valaya) and anklets (nūpura).

The extreme left niche of this landing, has a figure of Bhairava¹⁶ seated in the 'lalitāsana' posture. With his upper right hand he holds a sword (khaḍga or chhū-rikā), the corresponding left one contains a shield (khetaka). The lower right hand carries some vessel (pātra), probably the skull-bowl (kapāla), with the corresponding left hand he holds a human head, the blood leaking from it being drunk by his vehicle dog.

The niche, between the central and the above mentioned niches, is adorned with a figure of a goddess seated in the 'lalitāsana' posture. With her upper two hands she hold a trident and an elephant-goad respectively. The lower right hand touches her breast and the left one is placed on her corresponding left leg with an open palm.

Out of the five niches of the third landing on this direction the two, the central one and the one on its left, are completely mutilated figures and so they are difficult to identify. The two niches on the right of the central one has two-armed seated figures

15. Fig. 14

16. Fig. 15

one of a male and the other of a female. Both of them as indicated by one of their hands touching to the elbow, raised in the 'abhaya' like 'mudrā', seem to be in meditating posture.

The figure on extreme left is of a seated goddess in the 'lalitāsana' posture. She in her upper two hands hold a thunderbolt (vajra) and a noose (pāśa) respectively, the right lower hand is in 'varada' posture while the corresponding left one holds a picture (kalaśa). She probably, represents goddess Indrāṇī, the consort of Indra.¹⁷

The niches on the first two extremes of the first landing of the Northern direction are adorned with sculptures of standing Gaṇeśa. The central niche and the one on its right are vacant. The niche between the central and one on its left contains a figure of goddess Pārvatī.

The niche on the extreme right is decked with a figure of standing Gaṇeśa. His upper two hands hold a snake and an elephant-goad respectively. The lower two hands hold a rod (daṇḍa) and a picture respectively.

The beautiful figure of Gaṇeśa,¹⁸ in the niche on the extreme left end of this landing holds in his upper right hand an elephant-goad marked on the back with a three-hooded cobra, the corresponding left one is adorned with a scripture (pustaka). In the two lower hands he holds a pen (Lekhini) in the right one and a pitcher in the left one. There is a seated snake on

17. Fig. 16

18. Fig 17

his left. The figure of Gaṇeśa, also is canopied by five-hooded cobra represented on his back.

The niche between this and that of the central one contains probably a figure of Yamī, seated in a 'lalitāsana' posture. With her two upper hands she holds a trident (Tris'ūla) and a lotus in her upper two respective hands. The right hand holds a pen (lekhiṇī) which is kept in the ink-pot held by the corresponding left hand. On her left there is a seated figure of five-hooded cobra.

All the niches of the second landing of this directions are completely gone off, except the one on the extreme left. This niche contains a highly ornate image of Kubera,¹⁹ seated in the 'lalitāsana' posture. His upper right hand contains a money-purse (Nidhi), the corresponding left hand holds an elephant-goad. In his lower right hand he holds, a beautiful heavy mace, the corresponding left one being adorned with a citron fruit (Santān-mañjarī). The extreme right niche of this landing contains probably a figure of Nirti.

The third uppermost landing of this direction is completely destroyed.

Thus the thirty-three extant figures (the twenty-two being either displaced or extinct), found in the niches surrounding all the four directions of the Kuṇḍa. Most of them are in seating postures, few being standing. These extant figures may be tabulated as follows :

19. Fig. 18

Direction		Landings		
		I	II	III
East	1	Gaṇeśa	X	X
	2	Viṣṇu (?)	X	X
	3	X	X	X
	4	X	X	X
	5	Gaṇeśa	X	Indra
South	1	Gaṇeśa	Brahmā	Karttikeya
	2	Śitalā	X	Devī (Laxmī ?)
	3	X	X	Deva ?
	4	Agni	X	Devī ?
	5	Gaṇeśa	Yama	Devī ?
West	1	Gaṇeśa	Bhairav	Female (Two-armed)
	2	Mahiṣāsura-mardini	Devī ?	Male („)
	3	Saptarśi-maṇḍala	Caturmā-trikas	X
	4	Hariharārka	Devī	X
	5	Gaṇeśa	Varuṇa	Indrānī
North	1	Gaṇeśa	Niriti (?)	X
	2	X	X	X
	3	X	X	X
	4	Yamī	X	X
	5	Gaṇeśa	Kuber	X

Here four figures placed in the niches on the wall of the lower most section one on each side could not be assessed due to their immersion under the water, while eight corner-figures of the third intermediate landing are destroyed.

From the above table we can guess the scheme of the arrangement of divine beings in the Kuṇḍa.

(I) The central niches of each of the first and second landing of all the directions as suggested by the extant panels of Saptarśi-Maṇḍala and that of Caturmātrikās respectively of the Western direction were meant only for the setting of panels. None of the figures of the central square niches of the third landing running on all the direction is found in sits, but from the fragments of the unmutilated figures in some of the niches, it can be said that they were meant, not for the panel, but for singular representation of a god or a goddess.

(II) The eight figures of Gaṇeśa, standing in the 'dvibhaṅga' posture, are found arranged right-angular on each corner or on each of the both ends of all the four directions of the first landing. They, however carved in a slight different manner, respectively in the matter of the emblems held by them, then the injunction given in the Canonical Works, represent eight dvārapālas i. e. door-keepers in a pair for each direction. According to the Canonical Works, those at the East are Avighna and Vighnarāja, at the South Suvaktra and Balavān, at the West Gajakarṇa and Gokarṇa and at the North Susaumya and Śubhadāyaka. As stated there in these figures, representing eight door-keepers, should be dwarfish in stature and should possess terrifi

look; one of their hands should be in 'tarjanī' posture (scolding gesture of the forefinger of the hand), another should carry a daṇḍa (staff); and the two other hands, in the Avighna and Vighnarāja, carry the paraśu (battle-axe) and the lotus (padma); in the case of Suvaktra and Balavān, the khadga (sword) and the khetaka (shield); in the case of Gajakarṇa and Gokarṇa the 'dhanuṣa' (bow) and bāṇa (arrow); and lastly in the case of Susaumya the padma and the añkūśa (elephant-goad).²⁰

However, the eight figures of Gaṇeśa, in the Kuṇḍa, to some extent, are depicted in aversion to the rules given above, especially in the matter of weapons that they carry a sign of representing terrific work.

For instance, Nearly all the figures carry a serpent (sarpa) (a sign representing terrif look) in their upper right hand except the one on the West who holds a club (gadā, being associated with Viṣṇu) in his upper right hand. The terrific look of the figures are further added by representation of five-hooded cobra canoping some of the figures or by a seated snake on the left of the figures. Here two figures on the last carry a trident (triśūla) and a 'damaru', indicative of their association with Śiva, two figures on the South seem carry (as one of them surely holds) an elephant-goad (Añkūśa), associated with Indra; two on the West carrying a club (as stated above), associated with Viṣṇu and the two on the North carry a book (pustaka), a pen (Lekhini)

20. Aparājit prchhā, CCXX. W. 14-20; Rupamaṇḍana V, vv. 21-24; Dr. Gopinath Rao., Elements of Hindu Iconography, Vol. I, pt. I pp. 48 f.

and a pitcher (kumbha or kalas'a) indicative of their association with Brahmā.²¹

Thus these eight figures are unique in their representation and hardly seen elsewhere in Gujarat.

(III) The second landing of each direction seems to have been adorned with the principal regent deities. This we may guess from the extent figures of Varuṇa found in one of the Western niches, Yama in one of the Southern niches and Kubera in one of the Northern niches. The figure of Indra, regent deity of Eastern direction, seems to have been misplaced in the niche on the extreme of the left of the third landing of this direction.

From the extent figures of Bhairava and Brahmā in one of the Western and Southern niches, respectively, of the second landing, it seems that the missing two figures may be of Viṣṇu and Śiva respectively on the Eastern and the Northern directions of the landing.

(IV) The third landing of all the directions, mainly decked with figures of goddesses are adorned with the usual traditional weapons or represented in meditating postures. This can be proved by one such figure on the West and four Devi-figures on the South. Some figures on this landing however, are represented in the human forms either in a meditating posture or as a devotee-couple, two of them being found in the West. The interesting few other figures found in situ are

21. One of these two figures carrying all these seems representing a figure of Dvija Gajapati, one of the sixteen major forms of Gaṇeś'a narrated in the Canonical Work known as 'Śrī Tattvanidhi' (ED. Sri Venkatesvara Press, Bombay, V. S. 1958); ch. III, v. 75, p. 79.)

of Mahiśāsura-mardinī and Hariharārka of the first landing on the West and the one of Kārttikeya of the third landing on the South.

(V) Among some of the loose sculptures, probably once set in the niches of the landings of the Kūṭa, the noteworthy one is that of Gaja-Lakṣmī²² seated in the 'yogāsana' posture. In her two raised upper hands she holds a lotus in each of it, which is super-imposed with a standing figure of an elephant on each of her sides in an attitude of pouring water over her head with an inverted pot held in their trunks. Her two lower hands are damaged. Here nine pitchers containing the nine treasures (nava-nidhi) placed in front of the goddess are significant.

There other loose sculptures belong to some goddesses one of them seated in the 'padmāsana' posture holds in her upper two hands a trident and a lotus (indicated by a lotus-stalk) respectively. The lower right hand is in 'abhaya' posture, with the corresponding left one she holds some round object in the form of a sweet-ball (or bijapūraka ?)²³. The other figure of the goddess seated in 'lalitāsana' posture, holds a trident and a lotus with two upper hands. The two lower hands, even though damaged at the wrist are indicative of a 'cintana-mudrā,' the right one touching to her breast and left with an open-palm forming a ring of the figures. The third one seated in 'lalitāsana' posture, is badly damaged at her lower portion and her hands are gone off.

22. See Cover page 4.

23. Fig. 19

Still, however, her beautifully decked torso and head indicate the figure represents some major Devi. From the lustre on her face, the magnificent three-tiered and arched head-gear (mukuta), the 'patrakuṇḍala' in the ears, the beaded necklace set in with a beautiful pendent and a long 'hārāvali' passing and swinging below her breasts, a girdle (udarabandha) on her waist etc, are some of the prominent features which support the presumption made above. She definitely represents a female counter-part of some major Hindu deity.

These various forms of goddesses and the name of the Kuṇḍa itself suggest the association of this spot to some Tāntric Sect prevalent in Gujarat.

Some other divine sculptures, indicative of extinct temple or Torana associated with the Kuṇḍa, are also remarkable. Most of them, representing various gods and goddesses seem to be originally set in the Janghā moulding of the maṇḍovara (outer-faced wall) of the temple.

CONCLUSION

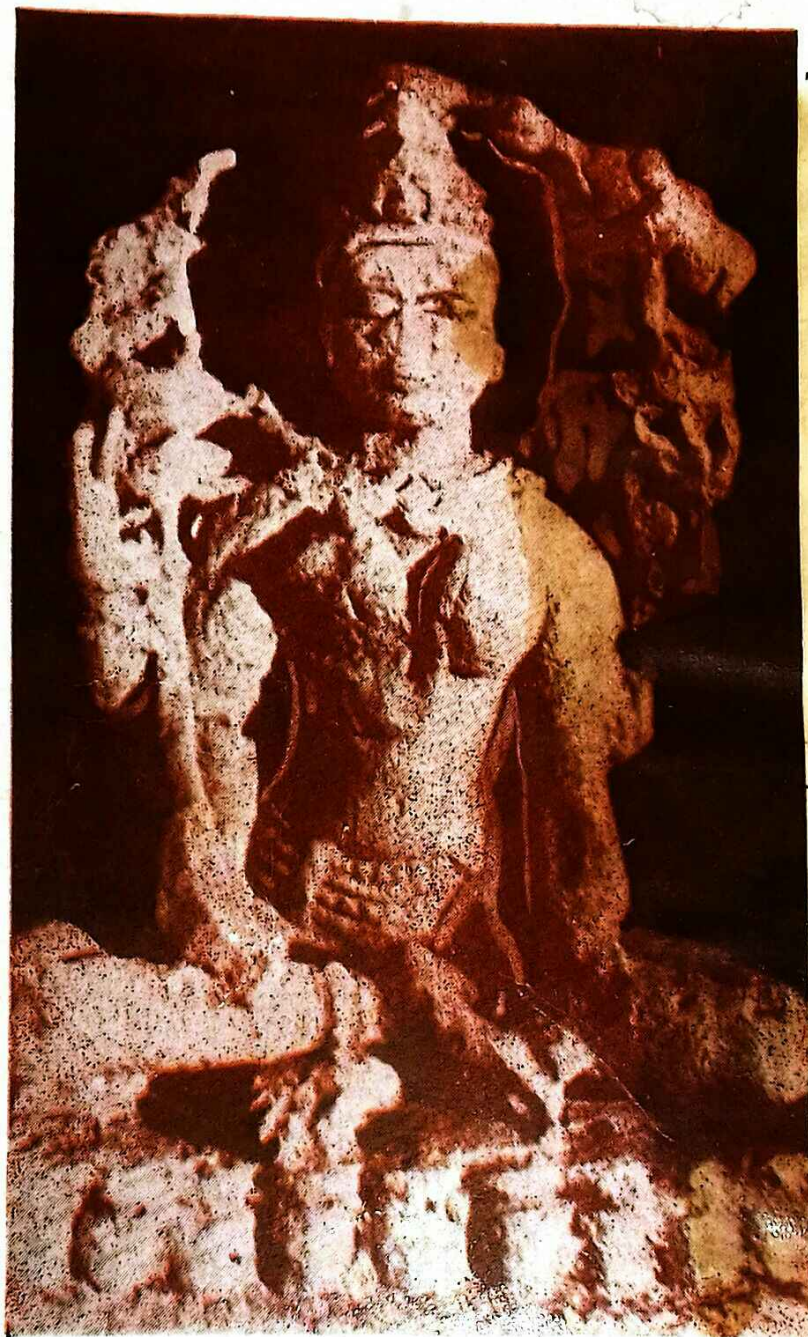
The S'akti Kuṇḍa at Akhaj is perhaps the oldest among the existing Kuṇḍas found in the region of North Gujarat. It is older than the famous Sūrya-Kuṇḍa at Modhera. Its situation was prominent in those days. Unfortunately no epigraphic or literary references regarding this Kuṇḍa are available. The Temple, Maṇḍapa and the Torana connected with it are vanished completely. The images in the Kuṇḍa are also worn-

out by the water, weather and vandalism. Still the extinct remains of the Kuṇḍa are strong enough to establish the past glory of this monument.

The name of this Kuṇḍa suggests that this complex would be devoted to some Hindu Goddess. The sculptures indicate that it would be a Tantric centre also. For the poor people this would be a sacred place, and for them a look at the Kuṇḍa would be as fruitful as the pilgrimage of Kāshī and a dip into the Kuṇḍa would also be as auspicious as to take a holy dip into the water of Gaṅgā.²⁴

24. संदर्शनात् पूर्णफलं च काश्याः । स्नानाश्च गङ्गाप्लवनस्य पुण्यम् ॥

Rajavallabha, 34-79



Gaja-Lakṣmī